A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT NORTHFIELD,

ON THE DAY OF

Public Thanksgiving:

NOVEMBER 29, 1804.

BY THOMAS MASON, *A. M.*

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN

NORTHFIELD.

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BY *JOHN DENIO.*

MDCCCIV.

NORTHFIELD, Nov. 29, 1804.

DEAR SIR,

THE underwritten, for themſelves, and in behalf of a very conſiderable portion of the inhabitants of *Northfield*, wait on you to expreſs their thanks for the patriotic and excellent SERMON, you have this day delivered; and to requeſt a copy for the Preſs.

We are dear Sir, with great
reſpect and eſteem,
your ſervants,

JOHN BARRETT,
SOLOMON VOSE,
OBADIAH DICKINSON,
EDWARD HOUGHTON,
CALEB LYMAN.

REV. TH: MASON.

ANSWER.

NORTHFIELD, Dec. 3, 1804.

GENTLEMEN,

PLEASE to accept, for yourſelves and thoſe you repreſent, my thanks for the favorable opinion, you have manifeſted, of the enſuing DISCOURSE; which I ſubmit, without apology, to your diſpoſal, and the candor of the public. Yours with eſteem,

THOMAS MASON.

Thomas Mason, A.M. was the great grandson of Ebenezer who, in turn, was the son of Thomas, the first Mason from England to America and from whom Lowell Mason was descended.

I purchased the Mason from the Old Settler Bookshop, Walpole, N. H. (R. Kilvoord), February 2, 1946

H.L.M.

A

SERMON.

THE energies of the human mind are waked into action, by an almoſt infinite variety of motives. Of the abſtract intelligent ſpirit, very little either is, or can be known by men. Yet, of its certain exiſtence, we can entertain no reaſonable doubts or ſuſpicions. In its exerciſes we obſerve ſomething, which we venture to call its attributes. But, ſtrictly ſpeaking, I conceive that, neither love, hatred, hope, fear, joy, grief, benevolence, gratitude, nor any of the intellectual or moral paſſions are found to be conſtituent parts of the human mind. The ſoul of man is a ſeparate exiſtence, independent of all the affections and paſſions, to which it is occaſionally incident. Without motives to excite it—without objects to call its powers into action, the mind of man would be forever at reſt, and remain in a ſtate of perpetual infancy.

THAT infinite variety of objects, by which the rational mind is capable of being affected, has been appointed in infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, as the means of its progreſſion in the attainment of that perfection, for which it was originally deſigned. And all the paſſions, when properly regulated and controlled, are capable of contributing to this deſirable end—of aiding man in the acquiſition of his ultimate perfection.

THE external ordinances of religion are all deſigned for awakning the powers of the human mind, and bringing into exerciſe its better, and more noble paſſions, and affections. To impreſs the ſoul with a principle of love to God, as a being perfect in all his attributes; and benevolence to man, under all his imperfections and neceſſities, is the final object

of all religion—the end of all human perfection. And such measures, as are best fitted to the promotion of this end, are those which ought to be cordially embraced, and steadily and uniformly pursued.

In all valuable improvements, external forms have always been found indispensably necessary. To attain the eminence at which it aspires, the human mind, as well as the body, must proceed by regular steps and gradations. Men may as well attempt to ascend the highest mountain, by a single effort of the body, as to rise to intellectual or moral eminence, without the intervention of external aids and assistances.

In all our pursuits, we ought always to make a clear distinction between the means, and the end; the external forms, and the thing to be acquired. As labor is not bread, and as books are not science; so neither are the external ordinances of religion to be accounted religion itself. There may be labor without bread, books without knowledge, and the forms of religion, without its genuine influences upon the soul. But, notwithstanding this, as we are not to expect bread without labor, nor knowledge without reading and meditation, so neither can we look for true religion, where its external forms and ordinances are not duly respected and regarded.

The separation of this day, to the business of religious worship, is designed as a mean of awakning the soul to sentiments of piety and devotion. And the method employed is justified, not only by the usage of our ancestors, but by the probable tendency of the thing itself.

In the very nature of the thing, it seems highly proper, at this season of the year, when the bounties of divine providence are collected for our participation, to come together, acknowledge the source of our enjoyments—adore that Being, whose benefaction they are—and by every exertion in our power, endeavor to render ourselves the subjects of his continued beneficence.

Gratitude to God is the particular religious affection, which the institution of this anniversary is designed to promote. We ought, therefore, as far as possible, minutely to understand what is embraced in this virtue of the christian character.

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It is no uncommon thing for men to confound this affection of the ſoul with that temper of mind, which they experience under circumſtances, and in ſcenes of proſperity. Joy and gratitude are, therefore, often conſidered as terms of nearly the ſame import and ſignification. But though there is no incompatibility between the exerciſe of theſe affections; yet ſo diverſe are they in their natures, that the one may, and ought to exiſt, where the other is wholly excluded. Gratitude to God is a principle, the reaſons of which ought always to influence the human mind; but joy is an affection confined wholly to ſcenes of pleaſure, and circumſtances of proſperity. Their difference, therefore, cannot fail of being readily perceived, and clearly underſtood. For gratitude is an unchangeable principle, which ought perpetually to influence the human mind; while joy is ſimply a paſſion, the exerciſe of which is merely incidental, depending upon the particular external circumſtances, in which we happen to be placed.

True gratitude to God does not, like mere joy, reſult from the particular pleaſures, or preſent enjoyments we feel; but from a rational conviction that, we are under the government of an all perfect Being, the meaſures of whoſe providence are all wiſely adapted to the promotion of our beſt, and trueſt intereſt. Though we may be under the preſſure of extreme grief, diſappointment and trouble; yet this ought, by no means, to interrupt, or abate the conſtant exerciſe of the moſt ardent gratitude to God. Even under experience of the keeneſt diſtreſſes, it is great impiety either to forget the moſt high, or to diſtruſt the goodneſs of his providence. For we may be ſure, if ſcenes of diſappointment and adverſity do not ultimately contribute to our happineſs, it muſt be owing to the miſimprovement, which we make of thoſe providences. Beſides the authority of his word, the perfections themſelves of God are a certain pledge that, all things ſhall work together for the good of thoſe, who love, regard, and obey his law.

The prime object of this day of thankſgiving is, not to inflate us with mere tranſports of joy; but to awaken in our breaſts a ſincere, and operative principle of gratitude to almighty God. And whether, in the courſe of the paſt

ſeaſon, we have experienced a ſeries of proſperities, or felt the accumulated weight of heavy and ſevere adverſities, we are bound to the like exerciſe of pious and devout gratitude.

I would not, however, be underſtood as giving credit to the abſurd notion that, we are to reverſe the conſtitution and laws of nature, by rejoicing while we are ſurrounded by the proper circumſtances, and inveſted by the appropriate motives of grief. This would be a temper of mind, both unfit in its own nature, unfriendly in its conſequences, and impoſſible to be reduced to practice. But the diſtinction already made between, both the principle, and the exerciſe of joy and gratitude is a ſufficient defence againſt every imputation of this nature. All that I would inſiſt upon is that, gratitude is a ſteady and immutable principle, which, when duly regulated, can receive neither force nor abatement in its exerciſe, by the accidental influence of either proſperity or adverſity.

To awaken into action this ſteady and divine principle, which, without exciting motives, is liable to become dormant in the human breaſt, is the deſign of this day's religious devotions. We ought to be ſenſible, and feelingly to realize that, all the good, which we have enjoyed, is from the hand of God; and the evils, which we have ſuffered, are of our own procuring. But yet, ſuch is the goodneſs of the divine nature, and the beneficence of God's providence that, even theſe evils themſelves are capable of being converted into the miniſters of human bleſſedneſs. Without the ſmalleſt prejudice to his other attributes, in all of which he is abſolutely perfect, we may ſay that, God is all benevolence. Such, indeed, is the character, under which he is revealed to men; and as he is diſplayed in the order and adminiſtration of his providence.

But as all duties, whether ſocial or religious, are deſigned for the benefit of man—to procure for him the beſt enjoyments of earth, and prepare him for the dignified glories of heaven, it becomes ſuitable that, our preſent religious devotions ſhould be made ſubſervient to the due regulation of human life. And, as the ſtate of man here below is changeable and fluctuating—as proſperity and adverſity are often found in ſo cloſe contact, as almoſt to contend for the

ſame place ; it becomes us to be prepared for every poſſible alternation that may await us.

As health, peace, and proſperity are the proper ſeaſons to ſhield ourſelves againſt the evils, or ſupport ourſelves under the calamities of ſickneſs, war, and adverſity ; ſo it cannot be judged a thing improvident, on an occaſion of thanksgiving, to impreſs our minds with a deep ſenſe of the uncontrollable viciſitudes of human life, that even the moſt unfriendly tranſition may not ſuddenly tranſport, or greatly confound us. For this reaſon I have choſen, as the ſubject of our religious meditations this day, thoſe words of David in his Song of thankſgiving, recorded in the xviiith Pſalm, at the 4th verſe :

" *The floods of ungodly men made me afraid.*"

THE occaſion of the Pſalmiſt's fear, as expreſſed in the words juſt read, is a ſubject of the moſt ſerious alarm to every intelligent reflecting man—to every one, who cheriſhes a ſuitable concern for the preſent happineſs, and future well being of the human family. Whoever does not coincide with the ſentiment of our text—whoever is not ſeriouſly alarmed at the riſing influence of the characters there deſcribed, muſt diſcover, at once, either a mind pinioned in the hard ſlavery of ignorance, or a heart overcharged with corruption and vice. The former, being freed from all terror by the ſovereign power of ignorance, are eaſily perſuaded to become the inſtruments of promoting the ungodly ; while the latter, being intereſted in the growing authority of unrighteouſneſs, can have no terrors, either to trouble or alarm them.

WHETHER or not we are menaced by the like terrors, it is not my deſign, at preſent, to enquire ; but only to make room for a due improvement, from the experience and calamities of others. Admitting, however, that this is not our preſent, yet it may be our future caſe. And no precautions can be too great, to enable us, with firmneſs and compoſure, to meet the calamities we may be called to ſuſtain.

To enable us to make a proper uſe of this ſentiment of the royal Pſalmiſt, I ſhall attend to the three following particulars :

FIRST—I ſhall give a deſcription of the character of thoſe men, who are the occaſion of this terror.

Secondly—I shall particularize some of the calamities which are likely to result from the undue influence of ungodly men.

And, thirdly, point out the behaviour proper for a good man, in view of such dangers and distresses.

First, then; I am to give a description of the character of those men, who are the occasion of this terror.

The peculiar characteristic, which the Psalmist has given us of these men, is that they are ungodly. The thing implied in this epithet will present us with a correct idea of that character, which was the occasion of this solicitude.

By consulting the purport of the word ungodly, as applied by the Psalmist, we shall find it, perhaps, universally employed, as synonymous with the word irreligious. It was, therefore, the abounding, and influence of men of irreligion and impiety, which occasioned those painful and distressing apprehensions, which are suggested in our text.

Men of this character—those, who neither fear God, nor regard his law, are, under all circumstances, a detriment to society. And the danger of their influence is always in proportion to their ability, and the motives and means presented them, for doing injury to their fellow-men. Irreligious men may have the ability, without either the motives or the means for the exercise of injustice and oppression.—Added to this, they may have both ability and motives, while the means of annoyance are not placed within their power. In both these cases, though they are, in fact, harmless and inoffensive; yet, in nature, they are extremely poisonous and detestable creatures. But when to the ability is added both the motives and the means of fraud and violence—when the lust of a wicked domination is encouraged by prevailing ignorance, and a growing corruption of manners, then we are to look for those fearful times and awful calamities, which occasioned the extreme solicitude and terror of the Psalmist. Indeed, that ambition, which discovers itself by an excessive craving after power, is one of the most striking characteristics by which the men described in our text are to be distinguished.

In all ages and nations the great body of the people have been far removed from the allurements of ambition

and perſonal promotion ; and it cannot reaſonbly be ſuppoſed that, they have ever knowingly volunteered, in aiding the meaſures of their own deſtruction. Where they have been miſled, and have thus been made the inſtruments of their own ruin, they have always been indebted, for their deluſion, to the artifices and fraud of the characters deſcribed in our text. The ſubtile machinations of ungodly and irreligious men have always been the occaſion of thoſe public and awful calamities, in which nations have been too often and fatally involved.

The author of our text had the moſt painful experience of the evils, reſulting from the influence of men of this deſcription. To what particular ſcene of diſtreſs he alludes, in the words under view, is not material for us to enquire. Several incidents of his reign are ſufficient to juſtify the terrors, expreſſed in the words of our text. But, of all thoſe that happened, there is no one ſo remarkable and conſpicuous, as the rebellion of his ſon Abſalom.

In the reign of David, the people of Iſrael were, perhaps, in the enjoyment of as many, and as great privileges, as their national character and circumſtances could poſſibly admit. But this was no ſecurity againſt the artifices and intrigues of unprincipled and irreligious men ; reſtleſs and aſpiring after diſtinctions, to which neither their merits, nor ſervices had ever given them the moſt diſtant pretenſions.

The meaſure, employed by this aſpiring demagogue to accompliſh the wicked purpoſe of his heart, was ſuch as has been copied, in all ſucceeding generations, by the turbulent minions of a moſt corrupt, and depraved ambition. To alarm the people with falſe terrors, and encourage them by deceitful and empty promiſes was the firſt meaſure of this arch factioniſt, to cheat them into wretchedneſs and ruin.— To wreſt the ſceptre from him, who had been the inſtrument of his exiſtence, and by whoſe partial favor he had been exalted to high eminence and honor, he deſcended to all the mean, and grovling artifices of indiſcriminate flattery and adulation. With the moſt ſtudied and malicious falſehood, he inveighs againſt the prudent meaſures, and wiſe maxims of his reverend father ; and invites their confidence

in himself, as a person combining that rare assemblage of virtues, whose private interest and ambition consisted solely in his anxious solicitude, for the prosperity and happiness of the people. As it is related by the sacred historian, "he rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate—lamenting that no one was deputed of the king to sit in judgment, to hear, and avenge the cause of the oppressed. O, says he, that I were made judge in the land; that every man, who had a suit or a cause, might come unto me, and I would do them justice. And it was so that, when any man came nigh to him, to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel, that came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel."

These measures he pursued, with the most unremitting assiduity, for the full space of forty years, before his base and nefarious purposes were fully ripened for execution. Thus, by promises hollow as the dreary echos of darkness, and fallacious as the falling tears of the crocodile, he became the idol of the people.

The sequel of Absalom's patriotism is too well known to need any particular rehearsal. It is, however, worthy of observation that, when he had assumed the royal vestments, his tender and extreme concern for the happiness of the people, yielded to the more excessive solicitude to stabilitate and confirm his usurped dominion. Like all his followers, in the annals of popular faction, he most decidedly testified that, like the lion, he crouched only to leap, and destroy. His dove-like tenderness suddenly disappeared, and the tiger, with all his rapacity, was at once discovered. His traitorous soul was, at first, well pleased with the counsel of Ahithophel, to smite the king only; and reserve all the faithful of Israel, as his dependent and degraded vassals. But, upon more mature deliberation, his thirst of butchery and blood was better satisfied with the counsel of Hushai, to fall upon them, till, of all the men, there should not be so much as one left. In every step of his conspiracy, we see, in Absalom, clearly delineated the character described in our text. And, in the delusions into which the people of Israel were infatuated by him, we may discover that state of society, which occasioned the fears and terrors of the Psalmist.

DISTINCT from all other conſiderations, this pretended, excluſive concern for the public intereſt and welfare is a characteriſtic extremely unaccountable and ſuſpicious. But when to this is added an evident defection of moral principle, and diſregard of the divine authority, to every intelligent and conſiderate mind the inference is irreſiſtibly concluſive. It is to the laſt degree diſtreſſing to remark the facility with which the great body of the people have been ſo often deluded by unprincipled and treacherous men. Honeſt and unſuſpecting themſelves, they have been led to imagine that zeal, ſo flaming, cannot be falſe; and that promiſes, ſo ſolemn, cannot be inſincere. Thus deluded, they have called for more deluſion—chanted, encore, to the ſyren ſong of their betrayers; till, as in the caſe of Abſalom, the revolutionary yell has waked them from their lethargy, and brought their wretchedneſs in full proſpect before them. With accidental variations, anſwering to the occaſional diſtinctions in ſociety, theſe are the meaſures, employed by the panders of a degenerate and corrupt ambition, to hurry mankind into ſcenes of wretchedneſs, and fatten on the ſpoils of their deſtruction.

SECONDLY—I ſhall particularize ſome of the calamities, which are likely to reſult from the undue influence of ungodly men.

THE firſt evil, which ſociety generally feels from the riſing influence of irreligious men, is a dereliction of moral principle, and a conſequent degeneracy of public character. Impious and unprincipled men are, generally, too well acquainted with the ſprings of human action to venture, at once, upon ſuch daring innovations, as would flagrantly contradict thoſe falſe promiſes, on which the popular favor has been erected. As all power is derived from the people, they muſt be preſerved under the influence of deluſion, till, by their own corruption, they are duly prepared for ſlavery, or the ſhackles of tyranny are faſt riveted to their hands. While the moral principles have their due influence, men will be conſcientiouſly reſtrained from affording ſupport and patronage to men of this character, in the open avowal of their final purpoſes. And, as theſe cannot be ultimately ſecreted, the public mind muſt be gradually prepared to reliſh, and approve them. In order, therefore, to looſen them from

all thoſe religious reſtraints, by which the execution of their wicked purpoſes might be any way embarraſſed, they are always induſtrious, in diſſeminating looſe and demoralizing ſentiments. The people are often taught to believe that, religion is a political ſcare-crow—that, its miniſters are the mercenary tools of a pretended nobility—and that, the ſeveral inſtitutions of ſociety are all calculated to abridge them of their invaluable rights, and ſink them into the loweſt ſtate of degradation and wretchedneſs. The ſucceſs of theſe meaſures undermines the pillars—ſaps the foundation of ſociety—and introduces an alarming degeneracy of public character.

In proportion as unprincipled men gain authority, irreligion and impiety will prevail. And ignorance, indecorum, and barbarity naturally follow, in the train of irreligion. By neglecting the inſtitutions of the goſpel, and conſequently diſregarding the authority of its doctrines, men naturally acquire a kind of rough, unfeeling, jealous, and ſavage ſpirit. This obſervation is ſtrongly corroborated, both by the ſtate of thoſe nations, where chriſtianity is not patronized; and, in chriſtian lands, by the private characters of thoſe particular individuals, who diſavow the authority of the goſpel. When, therefore, by the influence and intrigues of ungodly men, the public mind has become inſenſibly detached from the inſtitutions and authority of the goſpel, no firm foundation, either for the ſupport of public faith, private friendſhip, or ſocial enjoyment, can be any where diſcovered.

Christian nations, who have neglected their allegiance to their Saviour, are not in the ſtate of others, who have never known the goſpel. The ſuperſtition, with which their minds are ſhackled, may ſerve to render their barbariſm leſs intolerable. But a national rejection of the goſpel has always proved a rejection of all religion. No ſubſtitute has ever ſupplied its place. And, under theſe circumſtances, the condition of ſociety is a ſtate of barbariſm, without any of thoſe alleviations, which heathen ſuperſtition affords.

A further, but natural conſequence of the influence and authority of ungodly men, is the deſtruction of thoſe gradations in ſociety, by which wiſdom and virtue are diſ-

tinguiſhed from folly and vice. This ſtate of ſociety, and the calamities attending it, the prophet Iſaiah has well deſcribed.—" The mighty man," ſays he, " and the man of war, the judge and the prophet, the prudent and the ancient, the honorable man and the counſellor, ſhall be taken away—children ſhall be their princes, and babes ſhall rule over them. The people ſhall be oppreſſed every one by another, and every one by his neighbor ; the child ſhall behave himſelf proudly againſt the ancient, and the baſe againſt the honorable." In ſpite of all the clamors for equality, in every nation, whether barbarous or civilized, a nobility will exiſt. And where " nature's nobility," which conſiſts in talents, learning, and integrity, is deſtroyed ; and the public confidence is repoſed in men reſtleſs, intriguing and treacherous, the rights of the people will ſoon be jeopardized, and folly and madneſs become the currency of the times.

The experience of nations will aſſure us that, the influence of irreligious and ungodly men has moſt prevailed under thoſe governments, where there has been the moſt free and equal participation of all the privileges and rights of man. Under theſe circumſtances, the characters, above deſcribed, enjoy the means of exerciſing, with impunity, thoſe wicked and deſtructive artifices, by which their deteſtable purpoſes may be finally accompliſhed. But, under a government ſevere and inexorable, jealous of its own prerogatives, and vigilant in detecting thoſe, who would incumber its motions, all ſchemes of innovation are rendered fruſtrate and abortive. Enjoying, therefore, as we do, a conſtitution of government equally propitious to humanity, and favorable to the pernicious artifices of irreligious and ungodly men, we are doubly intereſted in guarding, with a watchful eye, againſt the ſmalleſt innovation of thoſe meaſures, which have ſecured to us ſuch unexampled proſperity and happineſs.

Another reaſon, why the moſt lenient and equitable governments are moſt expoſed to the ravages of corrupt ambition, is becauſe the full enjoyment of individual rights creates the moſt ſudden diſparity in the circumſtances and conditions of men. This ſeldom fails of exciting the envy and

reſentment of the intemperate of all claſſes—men of confuſed fortunes, and deſperate characters; and, eventually, of forming a junction with men of more happy auſpices, and daring ambition—who are ready to become the leaders of the indolent, and intemperate, and the deluders of the ignorant and unſuſpecting. And thus, it has generally happened that, the moſt lenient and equitable governments have been cruſhed by the wild, and ungoverned luſts of irreligious and ungodly men.

Again—What muſt be the ſtate of a nation, when the influence of irreligious and ungodly men has riſen to ſuch an eminence, as to deſtroy the authority and obligation of an oath? When the divine authority is effaced from the human mind, the energies of human government muſt be feeble and ineffectual. And the ſpectacle of a people, where the wild luſts and paſſions of corrupt nature are let looſe to their ſeveral purſuits, unreſtrained by all laws human and divine, muſt be truly alarming and terrible.

Distinct from the judgments of heaven, which every ſerious and thoughtful man muſt contemplate, as the certain conſequence of ſuch corruption and degeneracy, we have every reaſon to believe that, ſuch a ſtate of ſociety muſt nouriſh the ſeeds of its own deſtruction. The uniform experience of ages, as well as the reaſonableneſs of the thing itſelf, confirms this perſuaſion, beyond the power of contradiction or doubt.

These are ſome of the evils, which are likely to befall a nation, deluded into the meaſures of its own deſtruction, by the influence and authority of irreligious and ungodly men. And ſurely, they are ſuch as fully to juſtify all the apprehenſions and terrors, expreſſed by the Pſalmiſt, in the words of our text.

I now paſs, thirdly, to point out the behavior proper for a good man, in view of ſuch dangers and diſtreſſes.

Perhaps the flouriſhing, united, and happy ſtate of our country may be urged by ſome, as a ſufficient reaſon for omitting all enquiries and diſcuſſions of this nature. But it may well be inſiſted upon, that theſe very conſiderations are an ample apology for enquiring into the cauſes, in order to guard againſt the meaſures of public degeneracy and corrup-

tion. When the impoſitions, artifices, and intrigues of irreligious and ungodly men are known, only as related in the hiſtories of ancient times, and far diſtant nations—when no competitions exiſt, but to emulate each other in virtue and goodneſs—when unprincipled and licentious demagogues are known, only by their obſcurity, and the public contempt with which they are regarded—when, as a nation, we are entirely exempted from the evils of any political intolerance—when, among all claſſes of the people, but eſpecially among the higheſt officers of the nation, there is diſcovered an ardent zeal, for the promotion of pure and undefiled religion—when the ſabbath itſelf, and all the ordinances of piety are regarded with a conſcientious and ſcrupulous punctuality—when the riſing generation is taught, by the laudable example of their parents, to reſpect, and conſtantly to attend the inſtitutions and inſtructions of the goſpel—when the prime qualifications, for the appointment to high and important offices, are honeſty and ability—when, in the higheſt, and moſt conſpicuous departments of government, the manners, ſentiments, and morals of the people are thus guarded, by the example, the influence, and the authority of men of preeminent godlineſs—under theſe peculiarly happy and auſpicious circumſtances, I ſay, we are apt to fall into a dangerous ſecurity, and to feel ſuch an immovable ſtability as no adverſe occurrences can endanger. Admitting this to be our preſent condition, it is a proper ſeaſon to awaken our minds to a due ſenſe of the evils, which muſt attend the reverſion of our circumſtances. As thoſe, who conſider this to be a true ſtatement of our affairs, will not be likely to make any perſonal application of the meaſures and characteriſtics of corruption and degeneracy; and, as every intelligent and tho'tful man, who imagines any preſent terrors from the domination of the irreligious and ungodly, will juſtify a perſevering ſolicitude, for the reſtoration of the ſober maxims of truth and righteouſneſs; ſo, being diveſted of prejudice, all will be duly prepared for a right improvement of thoſe reflections, which have now been made, from the ſuggeſtion of the Pſalmiſt in our text.

The duty of a good man, under thoſe troubleſome and dangerous times ſuggeſted in our text, is plain and certain. And no doubts can exiſt, with reſpect to the leading characteriſtics of his behavior, unleſs he is

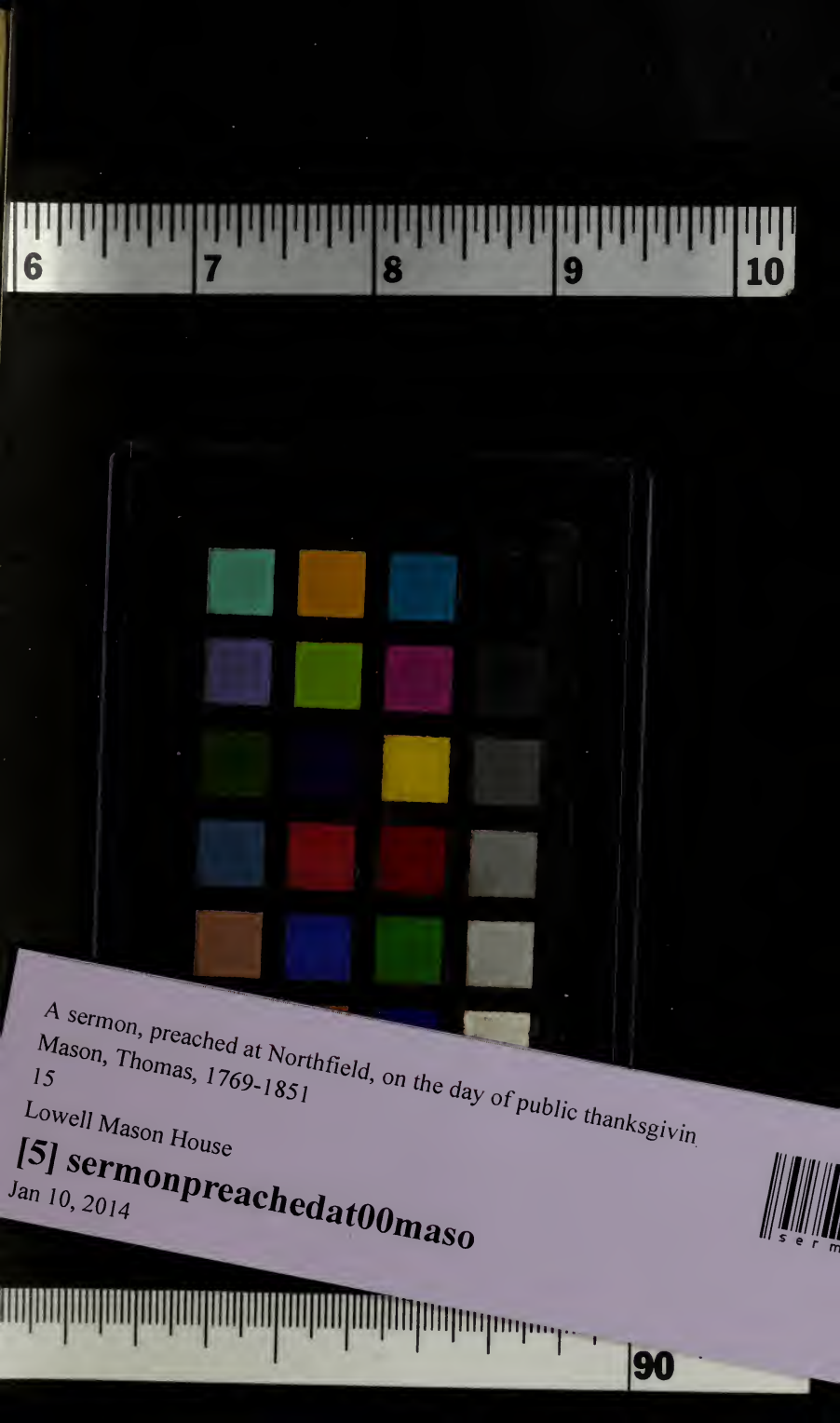
under the influence of a cringing policy, by which he hopes to ſecure the favor of the impious and ungodly. But, in regard to the particulars of his demeanor, he will find room for the exerciſe of much prudence, diſcretion, and wiſdom. Sometimes we muſt treat a fool according, and ſometimes not according to his folly. To the harmleſsneſs of the dove muſt be added the wiſdom of the ſerpent. But, in all caſes, there muſt be a ſtrict and conſcientious adherence to principle; and a firm reliance upon the final conſequences of the policy of truth and righteouſneſs. Though the enemies of virtue may flouriſh, and proſper for a ſeaſon; yet the triumph of the wicked ſhall be ſhort. Though an infuriated people may boaſt the meſſages of their chief, as being the voice of a God; yet the veil of deluſion ſhall ſoon be rent; and the worm that corrodes his vitals ſhall ſuddenly be diſcovered. "The Lord of hoſts will ſend among their fat ones leanneſs; and under their glory will he kindle a burning, like the burning of a fire."

With regard to the miniſters of the goſpel, from the ſtation in which they are placed, and the ſpecial command of God, they are under peculiar obligation to a manly, firm, and independent deciſion, both of character and conduct. They are ſet as the cenſors of the people; and, if they are not above the reproaches and menaces of unprincipled and corrupt men, they are unworthy the character which they are called to ſuſtain. Againſt unfaithfulneſs in his miniſters, God has appointed penalties paramount to all the evils, which irreligious and ungodly men can deviſe. And, though the floods of ungodly men may make them afraid, yet the fear of him, who has reſerved the full vials of his indignation to another ſtate of exiſtence, ſhould induce them to forego every evil, which the malice both of men and devils can inflict.

This is the duty, not only of the miniſters of the goſpel, but of all good men, in the ſeveral ranks and gradations of life. And thoſe, who ſhrink from the conteſt, in dangerous and diſtreſſing times, will find much work for penitence, when a right ſenſe of duty has regained its full dominion over their ſouls.

If, which God forbid! the times deſcribed in our text ſhould ever be witneſſed in this, our beloved, and hitherto happy country, every really good man would ſuſtain with fortitude, and even glory in the buffetings of Satan, and all his impious ſatellites.

Let us, therefore, enjoy the good things which Providence preſents, not with the vain preſumption that, the thing which is, or has been, ſhall always neceſſarily be; but with the firm perſuaſion that, God has reſted our happineſs as a nation, upon our national virtue and patriotiſm. Under this conviction may we live; and, to the lateſt poſterity, may the bleſſing of heaven be our portion, and our joy.



A sermon, preached at Northfield, on the day of public thanksgivin
Mason, Thomas, 1769-1851
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Lowell Mason House
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